

Hon. Jed S. Rakoff  
Daniel Patrick Moynihan United States Courthouse  
500 Pearl Street New York  
NY 10007-1312I

240 East 28th St, 12  
Kip Bay,  
NY, 10016  
7<sup>th</sup> June 2023

Dear Judge Rakoff,

My name is Sandra O'Connor, a divorced woman aged 58 and the mother of 3 boys, aged 35, 30 and 24. My youngest son is the defendant Joseph O'Connor.

I have been a Lawyer for the past 32 years. However, since Joseph's arrest I have worked as a consultant on a part-time basis and recently took a complete sabbatical due to these proceedings, as the situation has had a substantial effect upon my mental health and wellbeing. However, I am hoping to return to work and some normality, after the proceedings are concluded.

I have provided a detailed antecedent history pertaining to Joseph since his birth to Professor Sir Simon Baron-Cohen to assist in the medical report, he has prepared for the Court and I believe this document is exhibited to that report. I will therefore try not to repeat the contents therein to avoid unnecessary repetition.

As with most life events, it is often with more wisdom, objectivity and clarity of thought that we look back and see the reality of a period in our lives.

Hindsight is a wonderful thing, but I cannot change the past, but I am realistic that I have played a significant role in Joseph's actions that has led to these proceedings but ultimately, it is he who must take the responsibly and consequences, but I wish I would have had more insight to this online gaming world he entered and the dangers and influences he encountered, which I at the time did not even realize was occurring.

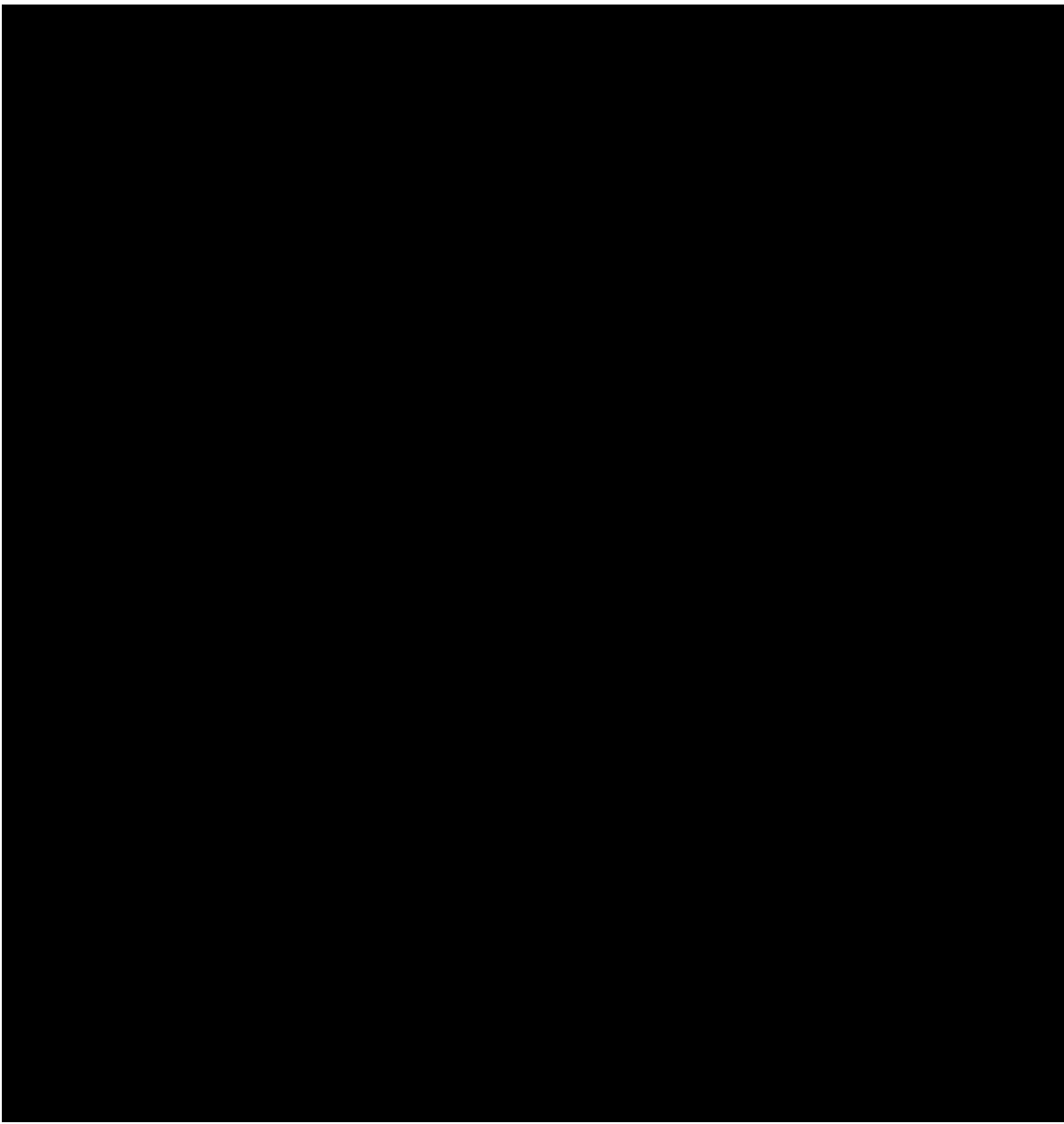
Joseph's, real problems occurred on returning to England from Spain, to attend secondary school. He attended 5 schools in a period of 5 years. Joseph not only requires routine, but it is a necessity and coupled with the fact that he finds change extremely difficult, it was perhaps foreseeable it would not end well.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I thought Joseph who was a character and quirky had been damaged by the trauma of his early formative years due to the domestic violence he had witnessed. As a mother it is impossible to be emotionally available and nurturing when you are effectively broken. I just went to work, on auto pilot looking after the children but unfortunately, it's the children who suffer the most as those crucial early years of loving nurturing are absent and damage results.

[REDACTED]



As most of us know through experience, unless you were exceptionally lucky, being the subject of any form of bullying in whatever form, whether name calling about appearance or more serious physical assaults, these influence a person and can shape you for the rest of your life. When you are at that most difficult part of life not quite a child but not an adult and trying to navigate what you are, were you belong amongst your peers can be the actual defining point in the making or breaking of a child.

Unfortunately, Joseph was breaking at the treatment and bullying he was subjected to, it was amplified by the fact he could not understand how people could be so unkind and violent towards him, when he often had never even spoken to or interacted with such individuals whilst at school.

I accept I was driven by this need for him to achieve academically and I thought that his adult life would be difficult unless he went to University, which would result in increased earning capacity as an adult, allowing him to lead a better life and a good standard of living, which is just not available to anyone who fails in the education system.

I did not balance that his real problem could not be addressed whilst in school, so I forced him to attend, watched his increasing anxiety and deterioration, hoping things would improve but they never did they just got worse. worse.

When Joseph attended his secondary school in Liverpool, he was handed a note from a boy which said it was his dad's number and to call.

We discussed this, and he flatly refused to call and said he did not wish to speak with or see him.

However, his father turned up unannounced and Joseph opened the door and told me he thought the man may be his father as he had not seen him for over 9 years.

He was reluctant to engage in any reconciliation and I encouraged it as I did not want my wider family again becoming the targets of threats, so Joseph agreed to see him. However, the relationship was a disaster. Joseph disliked him as a person, how he spoke to him how he spoke to me and refused to have any further meetings. This led to his father sending him abusive messages stating he was not like the son he had hoped and that he was a fat boy who should be sportier and more extrovert. To Joseph's credit he never responded and confirmed he had made the correct choice.

This obviously did affect him emotionally and he was always saying how sad it was that his father had ruined my life, had forced me to leave England when he was a baby and effected his brothers and that it would have been better for me if he had not been born. I reassured him that he was worth it, and I would not change the situation if it meant he was not born.

He told me I was rubbish at choosing men and that he hoped one day I met someone who was kind and would treat me well.

He was aware my first husband was a secret gambler who had left me in financial disaster after his addiction was discovered and my father came to the rescue and cleared all the debts he had accumulated and even took over paying my eldest son's school fees whilst I tried to move forward financially and emotionally. My second partner left me for his current wife whilst I was pregnant.

His absence of a father and extended paternal family has also been an issue for him, all boys need some form of role models in their lives. My father was an amazing grandfather to my eldest boys, especially Jake, he took him to his hospital appointment that were 3 times per week and waited for the 3-hour sessions to finish to then take him home, this enabled me to continue working. My father died unexpectedly whilst I was pregnant with Joseph and 24 years later, not a day goes by when I do not think about him and miss him and feel saddened that Joseph never got to receive the love and care their grandfather provided to his siblings.

His brothers both have good fathers and loving paternal extended families and when younger he tried to encourage me to meet someone who could be his dad, which is so sad, when he saw his young friends with their loving families and he effectively only had me.

Joseph then attended a College of further Education between the ages of 16 to 18, where he undertook a Business course, he found it preferable to High School. In England you can choose to remain at High school and study the normal curriculum or transfer to a college where the 2-year study course is aimed at one subject only, so a very specific pathway University. The class sizes were smaller, and he was treated more as an adult and there were less problems in fitting in and the course. Joseph only attended two days per week, which he felt he could manage. Although even to achieve this, I had to drive him there and back as travelling on public transport caused him too much anxiety, to such an extent, he worried so much about the journey that he felt physically ill with anxiety which prevented this form of travel. He cannot drive.

He obtained excellent grades and achieved high enough scores, to be able to apply to the higher caliber universities but decided to defer a place for a year, with no plans how to fill that time.

He had by this stage become more heavily involve in gaming and was always in his room, he had become reclusive and never wanted to mix with any family members.

I tried to speak to him to try and have him reduce the time in his room and growing isolation, as even his interaction with me was now minimal, he had even stopped eating dinners with me.

I did see the signs that Joseph's isolation and withdrawal from the world was affecting his nature and character.

I tried to speak to him to try and have him reduce the time in his room and growing isolation, as even his interaction with me was now minimal, he had even stopped eating dinners with me.

Our neighbor's granddaughter had committed suicide during this period as she was so unhappy with her school life and the death was so unexpected and devastating, that I changed how I dealt with him.

I stopped moaning at him for gaming and even felt at that time it was preferable to seeing him unhappy as I often heard him talking online and laughing loudly which was something he rarely does. For me, this was comforting and a good sign.

He started having his little pug dogs in his online live streaming games and I was reassured that he was not going to do anything like our neighbors granddaughter had done but I made a considerable effort to accommodate all the things he enjoyed, foods or listening to him talk about a particular tournament he was in, his scores , his viewers, his videos he made and posted online, I treated him with kid gloves.

During this period, he was also the victim of several hoax communications to the emergency services.

These involved hoax calls that I was the victim of being brutally raped by his father or that I was being being stabbed to death. I was always the person reported as the victim.

These hoax calls took place over 3 properties, including the address of Joseph's grandmother.

The interesting point that arose from these hoax calls was that Joseph was always interviewed by the police and he willingly provided his phone to the police to show he had not made the calls.

I had to explain on each occasion that it was hoax and provide details of similar occurrences and it was easily ascertained that they were in fact undertaken as an attack on Joseph.

Often the police treated Joseph inappropriately as if he was to blame for arguing over online games, as it was apparent it was not an unusual course of conduct in the gaming world to address slights, that hoax calls were made to seek retribution and punishment.

What also became apparent is, the hoaxers undertook these calls remotely but not using normal landlines or cellphones but using the internet and this allows them to show the callers number as being a mobile, which on first appearance it sometimes looked like Joseph's cell number but there was always a variance on close inspection of one different digit.

I always asked the Police officers who attended, to have the emergency calls which the control center received, to be sent to their devices, to enable for us all to listen to the actual recording.

The calls were always scripted calls and you could automatically recognize youth voices, exaggerated emotions, ranging from hysteria to normal speech within seconds and without fail all American males.

The calls contents were disgusting, and I later ascertained they were all scripted and taken from the Discord platform used by online gamers.

There was one occasion when Joseph had received a livestream recording showing a person outside our home, clearly showing our location.

This was posted on the online platform discord and was used to threaten Joseph that he was to be killed.

I immediately contacted the police and Joseph was able to provide the name and address of the person in the recording as being a local person, who had been paid by others to attend our home to prove to Joseph they knew where he was, and they could get to him.

This person was known to the police and we understand he was arrested.

After this episode I decided it had to stop and that Joseph's isolation had to be addressed and I had already decided we needed to return to Spain where he had enjoyed a much better life, so I accelerated my plans.

I made the necessary arrangements and within months we had moved.

I was able to work remotely and return to England for 3-day periods, ensuring Joseph was looked after in that short time period, by leaving prepared foods that just needed reheating and that everything he required was in stock, drinks and snacks.

I would return to chaos, a pile of dishes left on his desk, but he was oblivious to anything except his gaming.

In the Pandemic, I was prevented from returning to Spain, as although I was an official resident, I had been unable to collect my Residence card as the Government office was closed, during this period. I went to England for 2 days, during which time, Spain closed its borders to nonresidents and I was unable to reenter as I did not possess the official card.

During this period, I had to employ a housekeeper to look after Joseph and his dogs and I was so worried about him being alone. He was indifferent, he could just keep on gaming.

Joseph is a young man, although still very childlike and cannot undertake simple tasks, like attend a barber's appointment alone. He has no embarrassment that in his 20s his mother still takes him and speaks to the barber on his behalf and I must tell them how to cut his hair.

I decided that he had to undertake this task alone, drove him there, waited outside and he came out with a helmet haircut, no side burns which he hated but preferred a bad haircut than giving instruction to the barber.

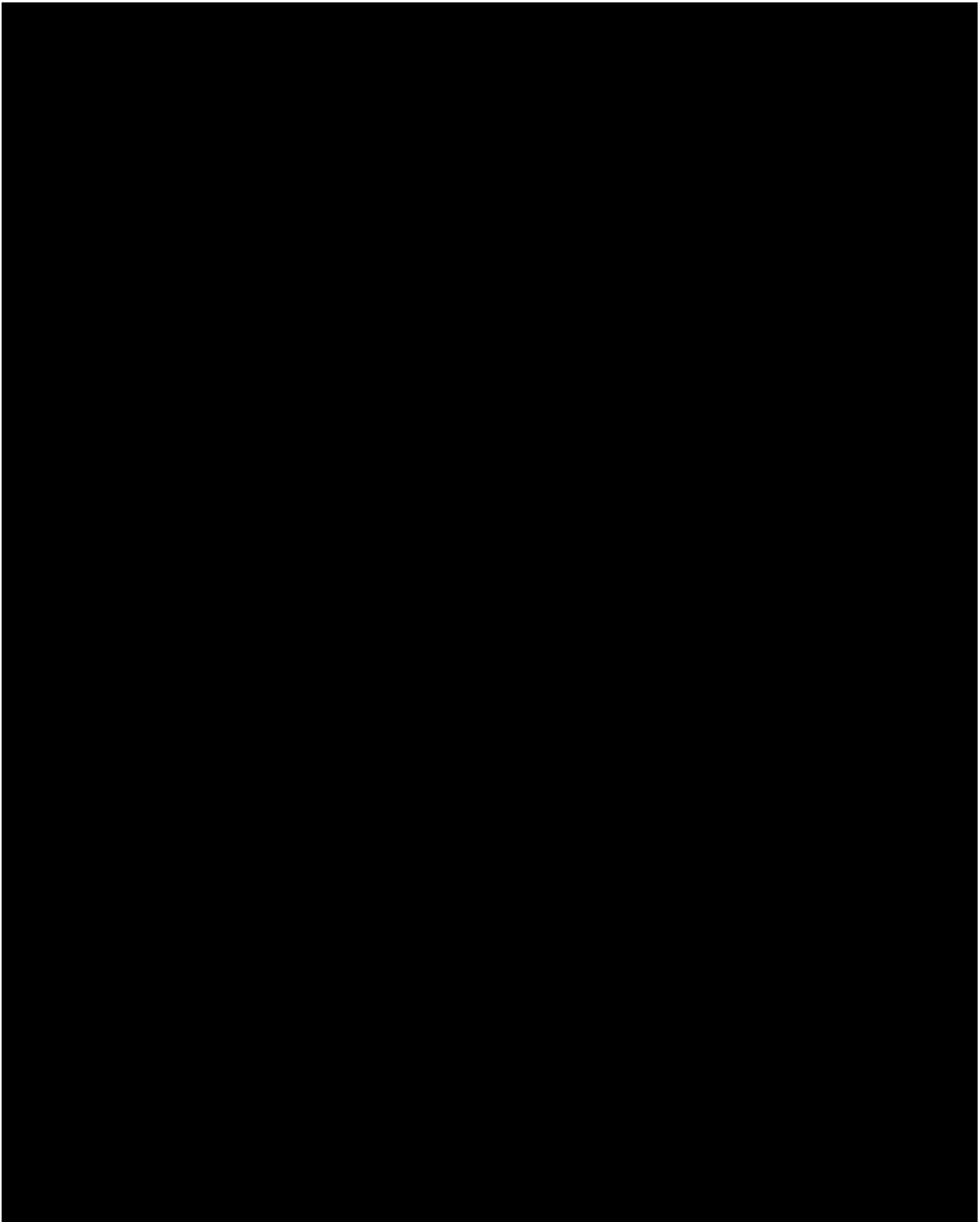
He has no interest in materialistic items, whether clothing or any other objects. He wears white comfortable t-shirts that must be a certain fabric and grey shorts again in a supima cotton blend. All the clothes I and his family buy him as gifts for birthday and Christmas are hanging in his wardrobe unworn with labels still attached. He has no personal items he values.

When he was arrested, he had cancelled a barber's appointment the day before and his hair was long and looked unkempt. He was more focussed on this than the fact he had been arrested and that he was subjected to extradition proceedings, as he can genuinely only focus on immediate things and not look at a wider picture of circumstances.

The same applied to when his extradition was approved and he knew he would imminently be moved from Malaga to Madrid for his air travel to New York, he was so preoccupied with talking about it, he would call me several times a day always wanting answers I could not provide, he wanted to know which prisons he would stop at on the journey, how long the duration of each driving part of the journey, what food would be available or even if they would feed him, his friend he met in prison Harry had told him the journey was a form of punishment. It is in fact the opposite, it is designed to avoid inhumane lengthy journeys and limits the drive time and requires constant stopping at prisons for refreshments showers and rest. However, Joseph does not cope well with change. He likes

certainty and this part of the process was extremely difficult for him as he was now to be taken out of his routine to the unknown and my answers were vague, guesswork and failed to calm him.

When he reached the prison in Madrid, he became ill and was provided with medical assistance, but he lost a considerable amount of weight. When I saw him in Court in New York, I was shocked at how thin he had become during that period, but I believe that the journey which took 4 days when he could not communicate with me and the constant change caused him severe emotional turmoil and anxiety that this cause his illness.





Regarding the actual offences I will not comment, as Joseph's Lawyers are more than capable in this regard, but I do feel it is important to bring to your attention as much information as possible to ensure you have the complete picture of the background leading to the offending.

The social media platform Discord is completely unregulated, a platform I never knew existed prior to Joseph's arrest but now is increasingly being mentioned in the media in relation to other criminal activities and prosecutions and without doubt will feature in many more in the future.

I am attaching some News Articles which clearly reports the very unpleasant reality of what is occurring on this Platform.

I had no idea when I heard Joseph chatting and laughing online, that he was doing so on the Discord platform, where he had been invited to join a group chat with other gamers he had played with for many years and then progressed to meet others, who were not gamers but Hackers which would lead to the actions he undertook and these proceedings.

It is here that every single Count on the indictment began.

What started out as friendly gamers having chats, was effectively a step into the world of criminality where Joseph would never have embarked upon outside of this virtual world.

He has asked me could he travel to New York to visit a new friend, I now know to be a stranger he had met on Discord. He wanted me to travel with him and I stay in a hotel alone and he stay with his friend and I would then, take him back to Spain.

Obviously, I refused and tried to talk about online dangers, safety, people can purportedly be anything they like behind a screen and keyboard but he was dismissive of this advice.

Discord was a platform where he thought he was liked and had lots of friends. In the cold light of day and on reflection he does not even know the names or backgrounds of these people, they could be 13 or 50, realistically they are strangers and sadly for him he did not see the reality and where it would lead, another example of living in the moment and not having the ability to stand back and assess and see the bigger picture.

I thought he was safe in his room, not in a world on the outside where he was ill equipped to navigate, where he was not in touch with any dangers, alcohol drugs bullying and the worst aspects of society but in fact he was involved in a worse world. Two years later, it is still hard to understand how harmless gaming led to this.

He partook in gaming tournaments, he created gaming video and tutorials, he proudly showed me, he live streamed his gaming and his online viewers totalling on occasions 25 thousand viewers

From undertaking a passion for gaming, sometimes meeting fellow gamers he also met others whose sole purpose is to use people like Joseph and people who are very young and impressionable to help them in their criminality.

Is Joseph responsible for his actions, of course he is and that's why he is in prison and pleaded guilty on the first possible opportunity.

Out of a terrible event, there has been a very beneficial outcome.

His gaming interest has been completely removed and his related discord gaming groups no longer exist after his absence. He has agreed that no gaming equipment will ever be allowed, which significantly reduces the risk of him returning to this previous obsession nor does he want to.

I asked when he was originally arrested, would it not be more beneficial to have someone like Joseph on Discord helping the authorities to avoid hacking incidents but was told the authorities had no interest in any such arrangements.

That was interesting as Joseph informed the FBI REACT force, where he provided evidence to them online, of the user name of the Discord account of the sole hacker which directly led to the FBI having sufficient evidence to obtain a warrant to obtain the evidence directly from Discord which led to the disclosure of the identity of Graham Ivan and his arrest shortly after.

He had been speaking to an agent from this Task force for months, speaking with him on the phone numerous times and Joseph said he was his friend. And he really liked him. Another example of his naivety and innocence

Joseph has now had the opportunity to partake in a world outside his bedroom although sadly with criminals who have committed murders, serious drug offending and who Joseph would never in his life had ordinarily ever needed to encounter.

But he has also realised how fortunate he is and how his life can be when released.

He has opportunities to work and study, be at home with me and hopefully within in the future the ability to live alone, he is looking forward to learning to drive, going for dinners, to go to the gym, to walk his dogs and to join the real world.

We have spoken of how he would like to help other gamers like himself not fall into the "Discord" world and I think this would be his real penance to society and something he could do and hopefully prevent others who are isolated as he was, gaming in their bedrooms repeating his history and also trying to reach out to parents, to prevent them having to endure what we have as a family.

The financial cost of assisting Joseph during the proceedings has changed the plans I had towards retiring in the future, being able to care for my mother in her final years which were all related to my savings, investments and retirement pot, all now gone. That again has hit Joseph hard. He is aware that it has affected me not only emotionally but very severely financially and I have not told him the full extent as making him feel guilty will not be productive.

There will be no inheritance for Joseph and his brothers. Fortunately, they both received assistance from me in the past, I helped buy my eldest son an Apartment whilst he was at university and I provided an apartment for Jake also. My inheritance from my father who was an extremely poor Irish immigrant, who worked hard his entire life has been used towards Joseph's legal fees in both Spain and the USA. My mother has provided all her lifesavings and kept only enough funds to cover her eventual funeral. She volunteered to even sell her home and downsize to help me with the fees.

The effects of a naïve, thoughtless boy have had devastating consequences not just for him but to us all and Joseph needs to lead an exemplary life from hereon in and atone. I have the greatest confidence he will do so and can be the nice, kind thoughtful loving and decent person he truly is.



He has shown how he has helped others in prison in Spain that he capable of so much more and I hope you feel you can be brave and give him the opportunity to progress and re-join society as soon as possible.

It was my birthday last week and Joseph arranged through his friend, to send me a personalised card His words really encapsulate that this is the Joseph I know and Love.

The front of the card reads

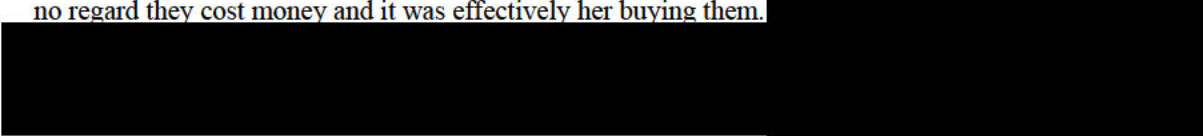
“Happy Birthday to the one who has loved, cared, helped worried and been there through it all”

The inside reads

“Mum, thank you for always being there for me, you’re a great mother and I love you a lot. I appreciate the early life lessons on not judging others and appreciating the little things in life, being able to understand other people’s problems and struggles etc from your wisdom. You are the smartest woman I know and will ever know and very kind and beautiful. Everyone who meets you or their families always say you are their favourite person and extremely rare and for that I am very proud of you and not have a bad word to say about you”.

He also had a huge beautiful bouquet of flowers sent, a gift-wrapped perfume, a box of gold decorated cupcakes with messages on the cakes.

Although thoughtful, these gifts were expensive, and he asked his friend Fatima to arrange them, with no regard they cost money and it was effectively her buying them.



I thank you for considering this rather lengthy letter and hope you have a clearer understanding of the young man who stands before you and that you are able to sentence him, in a way that is fair and just to his situation.

Yours Faithfully

Sandra O’Connor